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SOME WORDS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ORIGIN OF M. BULGAKOV'S HELLA (GELLA)

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M. Bulgakov, one of the most prominent Russian writers of the 20th c., began writing his most famous novel The Master and Margarita (M&M) in 1928 and continued to work on it until his death in 1940. The author destroyed the first manuscript in 1930 and tried for many years to find a suitable title. He finally decided on the current title in 1937. In 1966 the first part of the novel, heavily censored, was published in the monthly magazine Moskva; the second part appeared the following year. It has been said that approximately 12% of the text was left out of these first publications. The first uncensored version in Russian was published in Paris in 1967 and in Frankfurt in 1969. In the Soviet Union the first uncensored version was only published in 1973 (Kupp-Sazonov 2017: 224–225).

Since 1966–67 this novel has been translated into many foreign languages. There exist several English translations of this text and critics have very different opinions about those versions (May 1998). In our article examples from Glenny's translation (1992) will be used.

In fact, M. Bulgakov used many different oriental phenomena and motifs in M&M. There are at least two main reasons for Bulgakov's interest in the Ancient Near East (ANE). Bulgakov was well educated in theology; his father was an associate professor at the theology academy in Kiev. At the beginning of the 20th c. there was great interest in ANE history and culture in the Russian Empire, as well as in the rest of Europe. Bulgakov was also a friend of poet A. Akhmatova who showed great interest in the ANE and whose second husband was V. K. Shileiko (1891–1930) (Emelianov 2019), a famous Russian Assyriologist. As a result the importance of ANE motifs in M&M becomes immediately apparent right at the beginning of the novel when the author mentions ANE deities such as Marduk (Sommerfeld 1982; Johandi 2019), Osiris, Tammuz (Dumuzi), etc.

Berlioz's high tenor resounded along the empty avenue and as Mikhail Alexandrovich picked his way round the sort of historical pitfalls that can only be negotiated safely by a highly educated man, the poet learned more and more useful and instructive facts about the Egyptian god Osiris, son of Earth and Heaven, about the Phoenician god Thammuz, about Marduk and even about the fierce little-known god Vitzli-Putzli, who had once been held in great veneration by the Aztecs of Mexico. (p. 4.)

Not only deities but also other important ANE phenomena are introduced in the first pages of the novel, e.g., the religion of Zoroastrianism (Stausberg 2002, 2004), the month of *Nisannu* when the New Year celebration *Akitu*-festival (Sommer 2000) took place. In the current article we will focus only on one creature from Bulgakov's novel: the female vampire Hella.

Hella (GELLA)

Hella is depicted in Bulgakov's novel as one of the living dead, a demon and a female vampire. Let's first look at some descriptions from the novel itself.

The two robbers vanished and in their place appeared ***a completely naked girl – a redhead with eyes that burned with a phosphorescent glitter.*** */…/ The girl came right up to him and put her hands on his shoulders. /…/ 'Let me give you a kiss,' said the girl tenderly, her gleaming eyes close to his. Varenukha lost consciousness before he could feel her kiss.* (p. 125)

The girl increased her efforts, pushed her auburn head through the little upper pane, stretched out her arm as far as she could and began to pluck at the lower catch with her fingernails and shake the frame. Her arm, ***coloured deathly green***, ***started to stretch as if it were made of rubber***. *Finally her* ***green cadaverous fingers*** *caught the knob of the window-catch, turned it and the casement opened. /…/* ***The walking corpse*** *stepped on to the window-sill. Rimsky clearly saw* ***patches of decay on her breast***. *At that moment the sudden, joyful sound of a cock crowing rang out in the garden /…/* ***Wild fury distorted the girl's face as she swore hoarsely*** */…/The cock crowed again, the girl* ***gnashed her teeth*** *and* ***her auburn hair stood on end***. *At the third crow she turned and* ***flew out***. (p. 174)

The door had been opened by a girl, completely naked except for ***an indecent little lace apron****, a* ***white cap*** *and a* ***pair of little gold slippers****. She* ***had a perfect figure*** *and the only flaw in her looks was a* ***livid scar on her neck****.* (p. 227)

Woland describes her in the following way: *this is my maid, Hella. She's* ***prompt, clever, and there's no service she cannot perform for you*** (p. 288)

Above all it is worth mentioning that Hella differs from other members of Woland's suite since readers are given no information about her fate after the Satanic ball. She is not included in the final flight from Moscow. Bulgakov's widow Y. Bulgakova was once asked about this curious fact and she guessed that the author probably just forgot about this character. This does not seem impossible because we have to keep in mind that Bulgakov was already very ill when finishing his novel and the final editing was done by his wife. However, some research has also proposed that, since Hella is a lower-class demon, it is quite natural that she should disappear after the ball when she has fulfilled all her duties (Belobrovtseva; Kuljus 2004: 241). It is no simple matter to establish the origin of the character and her name because there exist many different theories, e.g.:

1.Mixture of different demons Lamia, Empusa and Mermolika from Greek mythology.
2. ANE Lilith.
3. Akkadian Lilītu.
4. Sumerian Galla and Akkadian *Gallû* demons.

L. Milne (1977: 50) claims that the name Hella "was borrowed" by Bulgakov from the Brockhaus-Efron Encyclopaedic dictionary, where in the chapter about witchcraft it is said that young girls who have become vampires after their death were called by this name on the island of Lesbos. Research on the novel by I. Belobrovtseva and S. Kuljus (2004: 240) has claimed that Hella is a character who is a compound of different creatures, more precisely of Empusa, Mermolika and Lamia. In Greek mythology Empusa is a monstrous spectre which was believed to devour human beings. It could appear in different forms and was sent out by Hecate to frighten travelers. It was believed usually to appear with one leg of brass and the other of an ass. Whenever a traveler addressed the monster with insulting words it would flee and emit a shrill sound. Mermolikas were demons in Greek mythology who ate small children (TGM).

In Greek mythology, Lamia was a Queen of Libya who became a child-murdering monster feared for her malevolence. According to the legend, the goddess Hera slayed all of Lamia's children in anger (except Scylla) due to the fact that Lamia had slept with her husband Zeus. Lamia's subsequent grief at the death of her children caused her to turn into a monster who took revenge on all mothers by stealing their children and devouring them (RE 23: 544-546). Lamia was a daughter of mortal man, the goddess Hera killed all of her children, and because of her grief she turned into a monster (RE 23: 545).

Belobrovtseva and Kuljus (2004: 240) are convinced that Hella's origins should be looked for in Hebraic and Sumerian mythology. In Hebraic culture Lamia is known as Lilith (Hutter 1999: 521).

Similar to Lamia is also the Babylonian female demon Lamashtu (Wiggermann 2011: 310, 316–319; 2000: 217–253). L. D. Weeks (1984: 238–239) claims that Hella is a direct reference to the Lilith legend in the ANE. Sumerian *líl* means 'a gale, emptiness'. In Sumerian mythology *líl*-demons are related to gales and their Akkadian equivalents are *lilû*, *lilītu* (MUNUS.LÍL.LÁ) and (*w*)*ardat lilî* 'storm demons' (Black et al. 2000: 182; Hutter 1999: 520-521; Farber 1989: 14-35).
Green and Black (2004: 118) have pointed out that "The male *lilû* and the two females *lilītu* and *ardat-lilî* are a sort of family group of demons. They are not gods. The *lilû* haunts desert and open country and is especially dangerous to pregnant women and infants. The *lilītu* seems to be a female equivalent, while the *ardat-lilî* (whose name means 'maiden *lilû*') seems to have the character of a frustrated bride, incapable of normal sexual activity. As such, she compensates by aggressive behaviour especially towards young men. The *ardat-lilî*, who is often mentioned in magical texts, seems to have some affinities with the Jewish Lilith (e.g. Isaiah 34:14). 'She is not a wife, a mother; she has not known happiness, has not undressed in front of her husband, has no milk in her breasts.' She was believed to cause impotence in men and sterility in women".
M. Hutter (1999: 520–521) emphasizes their sexuality. They are mostly female creatures without husbands who look for men and enter through the windows (as does Hella in the novel). They seduce men, but cannot give birth. In this sense Lilith is similar to Lamashtu and they are often considered to be the same creature. The motif of Lilith spread from Mesopotamia to Syria and from there to the West.

Lilith is already to be found in Sumer, such as in "Gilgamesh and the Hogweed Tree" and "Gilgamesh and Netherworld". In the first tale Inanna plants a tree in her garden in the hope of one day making a chair and a bed from it. The tree becomes infested, however, by a snake at its roots, a female demon (*lilītu*) in its center, and an Anzû bird in its branches. No matter what she tries, Inanna cannot rid herself of the pests and so appeals to her brother sun-god Utu for help. Utu refuses but her plea is heard by Gilgamesh who comes, heavily armed, and kills the snake. The demon and Anzû bird then flee and Gilgamesh, after taking the roots for himself, presents the trunk to Inanna to build her bed and chair from. From those roots Gilgamesh made the musical instruments *pukku* and *mikkû* (Afanas'eva 1979: 85–6). The *lilû* demon who is related to Lilith appears already in *SKL*, written in ca 2000 BC (Espak 2015: 57), where he appears as Gilgamesh's father. The Akkadian *Lilītu* belongs to a group of female vampires called succubi. *Lilītu* is described as possessing extraordinary beauty and a thirst for blood (Weeks 1984: 238–239).

The Greek version of this name is Γέλλως, a demon who harms newborns and their mothers, and the name *Gello* appears repeatedly in Greek texts. For example, Gello is mentioned by Zenobius the Greek sophist (Zenobii Proverbia 1839: 253). However, the origins of this form are probably not originally from Greece but from Mesopotamia where this name occurs in the Sumerian as *Galla* (gal5-la) and the Akkadian as *Gallû*, standing for a group of demons from the underworld who, according to A. Green and J. Black (2004: 85), "were responsible for bringing people into the underworld". Green and Black (2004: 85–86): *"The galla (Akkadian gallû) is one of the numerous types of underworld demons especially responsible for hauling unfortunate humans off to the* ***underworld.*** *Often mentioned in incantations in enumerations of seven types of evil demons (see* ***magic and sorcery),*** *the gallas in one magical text are said themselves to number seven (see* ***numbers). Inanna*** *is accompanied by gallas on*

her return from the underworld, and they set off in a pack to fetch the hapless ***Dumuzi*** *to the nether regions. Several Sumerian poems describe the deserted sheepfold of Dumuzi after the gallas have taken him away".*

These demons were also able to capture gods, e.g., in the myth "Innana's descent to netherworld" the goddess Inanna had to enter the underworld (Inanna decided that she would visit her sister Ereškigal, one of the rulers of the underworld), give up all her clothes, and could not return to the earth unless she left a replacement in the underworld. It was not generally possible to return from the underworld, even for gods. So in order to get back Inanna had to give her husband, the god Dumuzi, to the demons of Galla. The Galla demons took Dumuzi at the request of Ishtar and led him to the underworld where Dumuzi was forced to spend six months each year. While he is gone it is winter on the earth and when he returns to the earth again it is spring (Black; Green 2004: 85).

The possible ANE origin of Hella is also important from the point of view of translation. In Estonian and English translations the name *Гелла* has become *Hella*. This has happened most likely because it is common knowledge that many (especially German) foreign names and words originally beginning with the letter H are written in Russian with a G, e.g., *Hamburg – Гамбург*, *hertz – герц*. So it is possible that in both Estonian and English translations the name Гелла was treated as foreign name, and since in Russian it was written with the letter *G* it turned into an *H* in translated texts. However, if we consider the fact that M. Bulgakov named his character after *Gallû* or *Galla* then the vampire should be called Gella in other languages as well. We would add here that in some German translations (Bulgakow 1994) the name *Gella* is preserved.

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